

Two Poems · *Floyd Skloot*

FIRES

Your ax nicks
chips for tinder,
splits a block in two
strips that please you
with their kindling
power. Next you sink
the blade so deep into
a thicker log it stays
in place as you lift.
I listen to the pock
of wood on brick as you
work the last stakes
of oak free and sit
back on your tawny
haunches, breasts exposed
where your robe has fallen
open, waist-length hair
tucked into a faded Brooklyn
Dodgers cap to save it
from the flames that will
come of this.

In my hand, one long slip
of bark you peeled
for its scent rests
like a second skin.
I could not be
more ready for your
touch, but wait to watch
you light the day's
balled news of chaos
in Kazakhstan and poke

the blaze with a forked
madrone branch. Soon there
is fire between us
again and more heat
than we can bear.
Our shadowy pattern
flickers on the peeling
wall. My body fills
with warmth where it is
touched by the glowing
of your fires.

BEHIND GERSHWIN'S EYES

*Nobody else smelled burning garbage because
Gershwin's olfactory sensation came from a
slow-growing tumor on the right temporal
lobe of his brain.*

—Joan Peyser, *The Memory of All That*

They did not believe him.
They told him the smell
of burning garbage was all
in his head. Some mornings
it was all he could do
to lift his head from
the pillow. Some nights
his brain was on fire,
songs he thought would take
a hundred years to write
suddenly aflame behind
his bulging eyes.

Dizzy in the barber's
chair, dizzy before
the chorus, dizzy
on the tennis court.